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SUBJECT: CHOLERA RIOTS, PRISON DEATHS, AND CIVIL UNREST IN
NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

REF: A. MAPUTO 10
[B](#). 08MAPUTO1248

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On March 17, thirteen Mozambicans died in a police cell in the district police command of Mogincual, Nampula Province, of asphyxia and suffocation, according to Mozambican Police (PRM) reports of autopsy results. The detained persons were kept in a 4 by 2 meter cell with little ventilation that was designed for 12, but held between 34 and 48 detainees according to various news sources. Twenty-nine of those detained were members of a group of RENAMO sympathizers who were in custody since March 14 in connection with allegations of spreading disinformation about the Red Cross, efforts to fight cholera. Though the volunteers were adding chlorine to village wells and water points in the district, locals believed they were in fact adding cholera to their wells. Well-known sociologist Carlos Serra lays the blame on local distrust of foreigners and disinformation about chlorine treatment of water, which manifested itself in 2003 riots in Nampula over the same subject. More recently on March 14, violence broke out in the village of Quinga targeting Red Cross volunteers. The riots resulted in the deaths of 3 Mozambican Red Cross workers, two PRM officers, and the injury of a further 20 Red Cross employees, with 12 still unaccounted for. No Americans were involved in the incidents. The Red Cross has halted its efforts in the district, and many other NGOs have temporarily halted their activities due to the unrest. END SUMMARY.

13 DIE IN POLICE CUSTODY, 5 KILLED IN RIOTS

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Red Cross reports that 3 volunteers were killed, 20 were injured, and 12 are unaccounted for in March 14 riots in the village of Quinga, Mogincual district, that resulted from villagers believing widespread disinformation about Red Cross volunteers contaminating water points, rather than chlorinating water sources. Two PRM officers were also killed in the riots. The village of Quinga is reportedly deserted following the riots, with schools remaining closed.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The PRM District Commander Domingos Coutinho and Director of the Police Investigations Unit (PIC) Basilio Nakoto have been suspended in response to the death of 13 Mozambicans who died of asphyxia and suffocation while in custody for questioning related to the cholera riots. The 13 were part of a group of 29 RENAMO sympathizers who were being held for allegedly spreading disinformation about a Red Cross program to fight cholera in the region by chlorinating rural water points. RENAMO spokeswoman Ivone Soares categorically

denies that her party gave any instruction to disseminate disinformation. The 29 were held with up to 19 other detainees in a 4 by 2 meter cell with little ventilation since March 14. Family members reported to the press that though the incarcerated called for assistance from cell guards, their requests were ignored.

NUMBER OF CHOLERA CASES HIGH THIS YEAR

14. (SBU) The incidence of cholera cases continues to be higher than normal this year in Mozambique, with the total case load at about 1,000 per week country-wide, with more than 12,000 cases occurring in 2009, and a mortality rate of roughly one percent. Across Mozambique, the number of new cholera cases has begun to slow as the rainy season ends, except in Nampula province where 3,033 cases have occurred since January 2009. The Ministry of Health (MOH) continues to hold weekly cholera meetings, but have received little buy-in from other ministries such as Public Works to promote better access to adequate quantities of water for hygiene and adequate sanitation facilities. Minister of Health Paulo Garrido has requested the development of a Cholera Strategic Plan by March 20. The Ministry of Health does not have sufficient capacity to handle the current cholera outbreak in terms of personnel and facilities, although they are receiving some assistance from donors.

RURAL DISEMPOWERMENT LEADS TO VIOLENCE

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15. (SBU) The March 14 riots are very similar to cholera-related violence that occurred in 2003 in Nampula, in which the ruling FRELIMO party also blamed RENAMO for a campaign of disinformation, according to University Eduardo Mondlane (UEM) sociologist Carlos Serra. In a 2003 study, Serra pointed to growing dissatisfaction among people in rural areas who blame the Government of Mozambique (GRM) for not providing them with sufficient infrastructure. As such, Serra saw the 2003 riots as a protest against both the GRM and NGOs whom they view as providing unfulfilled promises of a better life, but in reality have distanced themselves from rural people and failed to provide basic services. Serra warns that outside of the major cities, Mozambicans often see the GRM and NGO employees as symbols of their own disempowerment, and the riots are symptomatic of their lack of access to infrastructure and employment. In 2003, Serra's study found no evidence of any RENAMO campaign of disinformation despite the ruling party's accusations.

COMMENT: POPULAR DISCONTENT BREWING

16. (SBU) The death of 13 Mozambicans in Mogincual underlies the significant popular concerns with the Ministry of Interior, particularly the PRM, issues we raised in the 2008 Human Rights Report, as do the rioting and mob justice that resulted in the lynching of three Red Cross volunteers and two PRM officials on March 14. Dissatisfaction with the GRM among rural groups who have yet to see tangible results of Mozambique's GDP growth suggests that there is deep-seated frustration, and a sense of disempowerment. The possibility of spontaneous violence and civil unrest, experienced in February 2008, may increase as Mozambique experiences further impacts of the global financial crisis in this election year.
Chapman